

SUBJECT: MEMBER SUCCESSION AND PROPOSED TRAINING PROGRAMME

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider Member succession planning as well as the proposed training programme.

2. Background

- 2.1 The City Solicitor, the Legal and Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Team Leader and Elections Manager have been considering the way in which the Council trains its Members and considers its succession planning and development of individual Members in order to ensure any transition for new members/current members who require additional skills in order to achieve their maximum potential in their roles.
- 2.2 It is recognised that the Council has a significant number of experienced elected Members with considerable knowledge regarding the operation of the Council. We need to ensure that this experience is not lost at the Council as its Membership changes over time.
- 2.3 Councillors have a critical role in the strategic direction of the Council, and of course in the decision-making process. By having local knowledge and a detailed awareness of the operation of the Council, elected Members can make informed decisions regarding the Council.
- 2.4 Member development events support the training of Councillors and have recently been focusing on all-Member events rather than targeted training. It is thought that to place an emphasis now on developing the skills of different levels of Members would promote an opportunity to target the upskilling of Members more efficiently, as well as resources for specific needs.

3. Summary of possible options

- 3.1 In December 2013, the Ethics and Engagement Committee debated the possibilities for reviewing the training programme and the following were summarised in that report accordingly:

3.2 Buddying

At present, members are inducted to the Council by officers. This usually also involves a meeting in their first week as a councillor with senior officers, at which officers are able to meet the councillors and to explain their respective roles and responsibilities. Whilst after this initial induction members remain able and are encouraged to contact Democratic Services or any other officers throughout their time as a councillor, elected members are very much given the freedom to work in their own way. There are advantages to allowing members to forge their own paths but there is the possibility that newly-elected councillors could lack the knowledge or the confidence to make the most effective use of the resources provided to them by the Council.

3.3 As such, consideration could be given to developing a formal 'buddying' system similar to that already in operation at some other councils. This buddying can take several forms, but will usually see a newly-elected councillor assigned to an experienced officer or councillor who can then act as a first point of contact for queries about the best way for a member to carry out their role. Any such role will normally be effectively time-limited by the councillor developing the skills and knowledge they need to function independently.

3.4 Within this relationship it is perhaps implicit that the 'buddy' is not intended to carry out the duties of the individual councillor or to micro-manage them in their first weeks; rather the role is one of general support and guidance while a new member builds the skills and knowledge needed to act independently and effectively. While members are already likely to seek support if required, formalising a single point of contact would perhaps encourage members to raise questions which would otherwise be unaddressed and to build a relationship of trust with the identified 'buddy'.

Long-Term Training

3.5 In addition to any buddying or shadowing schemes, the Council also needs to ensure that it provides members with the opportunity to plot their own development and have opportunities to improve their suitability for key roles, potentially on an independent basis rather than as part of a larger group.

3.6 Previously the Council has had access to events run by organisations such as the Local Government Association and Local Government East Midlands, although recent member interest has been relatively muted, possibly as a result of the time commitment required to complete the courses. Depending upon the available budget, officers will continue to offer the courses to the appropriate councillors as they become available.

3.7 The Council has also tried to implement personal development plans for Councillors on a number of occasions with limited success. While the documents act as an effective framework for an initial discussion regarding long-term plans for new councillors, there have been difficulties in following up on the plans with effective outcomes. This is likely to be primarily related to pressures upon councillors' time to carry out existing duties in combination with the relatively limited tailored training that the Council can offer within existing budgets.

- 3.8 It should be stressed that the Council has an annual member development budget of £5,000 which covers member training as a whole, and includes both access to development opportunities for individual councillors and for training provided to councillors as a group. It is likely that any significant increase in the scope of individual training opportunities would place significant pressure upon this budget. By way of example, just one councillor studying for an MBA on an assessment only part-time basis at the University of Lincoln would exceed the Council's annual budget in each of the years of study.
- 3.9 Current in-house provision is often tailored around the needs of individual committees and councillors' participation in them. For example, Planning Committee training is provided for all those members who are likely to take part in planning decisions over the course of a year. If members expressed interest in a particular area of council business there is potentially scope for a relevant officer to deliver informal professional guidance aimed at developing the councillor's capacity to function in this area. While many members will already resort to officers with questions relating to the technical aspects of a service-specific enquiry, a more structured approach could see greater detail being provided to members if a councillor were able to pinpoint the type of knowledge they would like to acquire. One possible constraint in this direction would be pressure upon officer time and the practicalities of any such option would require further consideration.
- 3.10 The outcome of the meeting of the Ethics and Engagement Committee in December 2013 is set out in the below extract of the minutes:
- 3.11 Members:
- noted the value of assessing the manner in which new councillors had previously been inducted.
 - stressed that succession planning was an important issue for the Council as a whole, and that there was a need for the Council to renew itself through new councillors.
 - noted the impact of the change from the previous committee system in undermining members' specialist knowledge of particular areas of Council business.
 - supported the introduction of role-shadowing, subject to it being made clear that the role was being provided on a purely educative basis not entailing special responsibilities.
 - highlighted the need for training to go beyond the purely reactive and to have a view to long-term development.
 - stressed the leading role that councillors ought to play in inducting new councillors.
 - highlighted the difficulties with attempting to introduce a formal assistant portfolio holder role within a council comprising relatively few councillors.
- 3.12 It is perhaps appropriate at this time to consider these suggestions further.

4. Tiered Training

4.1 Alongside the Buddying, Shadowing and general training programme, it is envisaged that there should be a programme of training with different levels. These are suggested to be as follows:-

4.2 Level 1: New members

The training programme for new members would include the induction programme, alongside generic training programmed through the year from in-house provisions and training for specific committees as required, which may include the following:-

Engagement with Vision 2020

Governance

Constitution including Member protocols, social media, gifts and hospitality

Role of members – in wards/the council/back benchers

Local government structure

Local government finance

Data Protection framework

Key organisational strategies – customer experience

Key framework documents – complaints, IMP's, officer appointments

The induction programme would comprise of sessions whereby new members are informed of the key things they really need to know upon becoming a City Councillor, together with opportunities to meet key officers and understand the service areas they are responsible for.

4.3 Level 2

Training for Chairs, Vice-Chairs and those members on an intermediary level, with possible elements as follows:-

Chairing meetings

Specific committee training

Mandatory training on Licensing & Planning

Scrutiny

Level 2 would be more tailored around those members with specific roles or responsibilities to support them in their respective roles. It will also support those members who aspire to undertake key roles at the Council, such as Chairs or Vice-Chairs of committees or members of the Executive in the future. This will provide the authority with an element of succession planning and provide members with an opportunity to highlight any particular ambitions they may have in respect of the Council's decision-making structure.

Level 2 members may have a role in assisting newly-elected members by providing a briefing as part of the induction programme. This would provide an opportunity for members to share their experiences, outline the main things they have learned in their time as a member and clarify the key things they felt that they needed to know when they were first elected.

4.4 Level 3:- Executive members, and potential Executive members

This tier of training would be focused upon ensuring that the Executive are able to fulfil their role sufficiently and effectively and they can make informed decisions. This will also focus on member successions and providing training and mentoring for any members from Level 2 who are aspiring to become Level 3 members and could include the following:-

Executive arrangements

Regional and national LG politics and administration

Public meetings

Comms/media training

- 4.5 It will be proposed to take this training programme into the new municipal year in 2018 in order to focus more attention on member succession planning, and developing the skills of individual members according to their experience and ambitions.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 That the report be noted.